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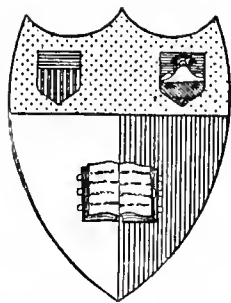
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# STOLEN AUREOLES

T. EDMUND HARVEY

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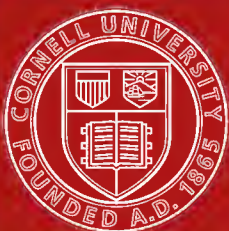
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# STOLEN AUREOLES





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# STOLEN AUREOLES



Legends now for the first time  
collected together by

T. EDMUND HARVEY



OXFORD:  
BASIL BLACKWELL · BROAD STREET

1922



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# CONTENTS



PREFACE . . . . .	7
THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS . . . .	11
ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE . . . .	25
THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA . . . .	41
ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS . . . .	53
THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID . . . .	67



## PREFACE



IT would appear to be due to the reader to preface these legends, now for the first time made accessible to the general public, with a brief notice of the sources from which they are derived. In the form in which they are now presented, the legends are obviously the work of a modern redactor, but based upon pre-existing material. In attempting to trace the source of the legends, I have found satisfactory manuscript authorities, in part at least, to be unhappily no longer extant, but I have had the opportunity of consulting what appears to be the original manuscript forming the basis of the last two legends. This manuscript is at present preserved in a private library in the North of England. The script is certainly not earlier than the late thirteenth century and I am inclined to assign it to a considerably later date. The manuscript is carelessly written, with frequent corrections and interpolations, and though the ink varies and the size of the page is not uniform, I have not been able to detect the trace of the handwriting of more than one scribe, undoubtedly an Englishman. The legends certainly contain material which has not been made use of by the Bollandist fathers, who would perhaps have hesitated to avail themselves of incidents whose historicity may rightly be questioned by many. Nor indeed is it likely that even Surius can have had access

## PREFACE

to the sources which this English scribe drew upon for his compilation. A careful perusal of the manuscript induces me with some hesitation to form the conclusion that, in spite of the simplicity of much of the narrative, it comes from a tainted source. There is, it is true, nothing which directly points to Lollard influence, but certain phrases used are clearly heretical in tendency, and no doubt as to the character of the work would remain, if it could be proved that it is by the same writer as an imperfect manuscript, of which a couple of leaves are now extant in the same collection. The MS. in question contains the opening paragraphs of a life of SS. Ananias and Sapphira, and maintains that these saints, who are quite unknown to the Calendar, have had great influence for many ages in the Church and are the object of a widespread cult, of which, needless to say, no trace can now be found. It would be not unreasonable to suppose that the mutilated condition of this fragment is due to the natural indignation of some orthodox reader, who very properly consigned the rest of the narrative to the flames. In any case the evidence seems hardly conclusive enough to prevent the publication of these legends for what they are worth, in the hope that at some future date fresh light may be thrown upon the subject by more competent critics.

T.E.H.

THE LEGEND OF  
ST. EUTYCHUS



## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

**I**T is much to be regretted by the faithful that a due share of public honour and devotion has not yet been rendered by the world at large to the memory of this great Saint, whose life and example has exercised so profound an influence upon the Church.

To the superficial observer this may perhaps be accounted for by the all too brief account preserved for us in the Scriptures of a single incident in the early life of the Saint. But it is not so with those who know something of the way in which succeeding generations of churchgoers have been encouraged by his example, or who have studied the formative influence of his later years in fostering within the Church that calm attitude of mind which has so largely aided her to steer her even course through the troubled waters

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

of the world, unmoved by the winds of enthusiasm or the dangerous currents of false doctrine through which she has peacefully passed.

Such thinkers will rightly urge that the meagre record of the narrative contained in the Book of the Acts should be read in the light of all that we can gather from tradition and history of the later life of the Saint. We must form our estimate of his character, not so much from the promise of his budding youth, as from the ripe fruit of his maturer years. Let us turn then to the picture which is thus presented to us, and supplement it, if we will, by recalling some of those sayings of his, which were the outcome of rich experience and have often proved a source of help and comfort to those who have learned to look great problems in the face and pass on undismayed.

It was in early middle life that St. Eutychus was called to the great position in the Church, which he filled with glory for so many years, when he was chosen by the unanimous voice of the faithful to be Bishop of Laodicea. He shrank at first, with modesty, from a charge of such great honour and importance. He was, indeed, called to preside over what was then the wealthiest Church of Asia, a position all the



## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

more distinguished because of the storm of persecution which seemed then about to threaten the very life of the Church. But it was just this circumstance that finally determined his choice ; could he desert a Church so wealthy, so honoured amongst her sisters and those who were without, at such an hour of need ? Might it not be given to him by a wise guidance of her members at that difficult time to preserve intact this inestimable treasure ? His path was made clearer by the fact that there were not wanting certain unworthy spirits ready to impute to this holy man base motives which it would not beseem us so much as to set forth in writing. Such malicious men carried no weight with Eutychus : their slander made his duty easier to bear, since it brought with it this cross of self denial.

The Church of Laodicea had been distinguished from early times by the breadth and unity of spirit which characterised its members, joined as they were by a holy zeal for all good things, which never went forth into any excess of enthusiasm, and was always tempered by a restraining caution and a wide charity which had due regard to the feelings of the world without. It was this spirit which especially appealed to the Saint at this time : he felt that here

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

was a priceless heritage, which must be preserved and passed on, even at the cost of the sacrifice of strong personal predilections. To keep this calm and quiet spirit of holy compromise it was surely worth while surrendering much.

The years more than justified his choice. While other Churches languished under persecution or were desolated by the growth of terrible heresies, some of them so abominable that few but trained theologians could distinguish them from the truth, the Church of Laodicea flourished at peace with itself and with all men. Not that it must be supposed that its witness slackened for a moment under the influence of pagan persecution. This calumny was, indeed, not the least of the burdens which Eutychus and his followers were willing to bear for the cause they had at heart. He perceived clearly, and taught his flock to see too, that, while truth is eternal, our emphasis upon different sides of truth must vary with the changing needs of the time and with the different circles amongst whom we mix. To use the same language to all, to dwell on the same aspects of truth at every hour is in effect, he said, to be false to truth itself. Rightly to deal out the word of truth was, he saw, no easy task ; it was, he held, the peculiar

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

grace of a good and faithful bishop thus to perceive what should be said and what left unsaid. For laymen, or even for the officers of the church who lacked this clear sense of the fitting economy of things, the best course was silence. Nor must this be taken to apply to words alone; our actions often speak more loudly and harshly, said Eutychus, even than words: let us, then, be very careful especially when the times are evil, lest our actions give needless offence to those who have not yet received enlightenment, or furnish a handle to the enemies of the church, who are ever waiting to ravage the flock. Thus when the edicts of the Emperor stirred up persecution in Asia, the Church of Laodicea stood almost alone, with admirable courage, in the way in which it kept its faith, and at the same time showed that respect for law and authority which the apostles had enjoined only a generation before upon their disciples, but which too many of their would-be followers now disregarded. Eutychus had no unity with the narrow spirit of fanaticism which led these men to emphasize one commandment at the expense of others. He saw that in so doing they imperilled the souls of the weaker brethren, whom they compelled to choose between martyrdom and renunciation of their belief. When the storm

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

broke and news of the edicts reached Laodicea, Eutychus gathered his people around him, exhorting them to be calm, and above all to exercise a holy caution in this dark hour of trial. Some amongst them were perhaps zealous for the martyr's crown, but let them rather, he urged, consider the eternal welfare of their persecutors, and be willing to sacrifice a joy which must cost others so dear. They had been taught by the apostles to honour those in authority, to respect the law. In so far as conscience suffered, it was their clear duty to comply with every command of the magistrates. They could not, of course, offer worship to the Emperor, but in this worship of their pagan brethren they could recognise much which was good, and they might readily admit that some symbol of loyalty to the great empire was needful for the uneducated mind. They knew that an image was but so much marble or metal, with no power of its own to injure or to bless ; the burning of incense was in itself a harmless thing, and might even afford a certain legitimate though restrained pleasure. What was all important was the attitude of mind and heart of the man who burnt this incense. Did he offer it in idolatrous worship to the image of a mere man ? That was paganism ; for which they could make no excuse. Did

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

he, guarding jealously the truth in his heart, incline his head before the majesty of law, and, while throwing the incense into the flames, offer up the pure sacrifice of his prayers for the good of the Emperor and his officers, but not to any image that might be before him? That was surely the attitude of heart and will which would commend itself to every true member of the Church of Laodicea, bearing in mind the words which they had so often heard within those walls : “ Add to your piety prudence, and to your prudence common sense ; and let not your hearts be lifted up against compromise.”

With these words scarce restrained he some of the more ardent among them from the desire of martyrdom.

Thus was the Church of Laodicea preserved through a time of much peril. The years passed by, and it still flourished exceedingly. Eutychus, full of years and honours, was like ere long to sleep with his fathers, and no man could have foreseen that, after all, he was to win that crown of martyrdom which in his unselfish zeal for others he had so long foregone.

In approaching the closing act of the Saint's life, we must warn the student that we are on somewhat uncertain ground. For his earlier episcopal career and teaching we

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

have, indeed, no contemporary authority, but the sayings attributed to the Saint are of a character which speaks for itself, and we have no desire to question their authenticity. I refer especially to the Forty Platitudes, and to the profounder doctrinal teaching incorporated in the "Letter to a Devout Lady," which was, perhaps, compiled by some disciple of the Saint from a collection of his sayings, unhappily no longer extant.

It is unfortunately otherwise with the martyrdom of St. Eutychus. We possess no other authority for this than the apocryphal Acts of St. Eutychus, which cannot be dated earlier than the 4th century, if indeed they are not, as I incline to suspect, of much more recent origin.

No complete MS. of the Acts of St. Eutychus appears to be now in existence; the opening passages probably contained an account of the outburst of persecution in which the Saint was martyred. He appears to have retreated from Laodicea to the adjoining country district, doubtless yielding reluctantly to the pressure of his flock: some fragments in the Lambeth Palace library may, perhaps, refer to this period. It would seem that the Saint was so beset by his pursuers that while he slept he only closed one eye at a time: he would often wander

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

alone in the country and seat himself on a fence, from which he was able to behold the approach of danger. It must have been on one of these occasions that he was captured by a band of soldiers, who found the old man, girt with a rustic apron, humbly engaged in trimming a hedge.

When brought before the magistrate, Eutychus was at once surrounded by a cloud of false witnesses, one of whom accused him of having secreted vast wealth by his superstitious rites : to this the Saint simply replied that his treasure was in heaven. Others swore that by the use of magic arts, he had frequently been known to face both ways at once, and that he had even made black appear white by uttering certain words which he was wont to use for such purposes. At this the judge became filled with anger, and commanded the Saint to be thrown into a cauldron of seething hot water, which had been prepared hard by. And lo ! by a miracle marvellous to relate, as the water touched the Saint it became lukewarm, and the bubbling waves sank down, as though one had poured oil upon them.

Yet was the wrath of the cruel judge in no wise abated : he bade them take Eutychus away, and decreed that he should be exposed on the next day to the lions.

## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

But even the fierce beasts revolted against the unjust will of the judge ; for when they came to where Eutychus lay, with his head humbly laid in the sand, they did but sniff the air about him and forthwith turned about and went back to their den.

The magistrate then gave command that they should make ready to burn Eutychus before a slow fire, and he was taken back to prison to die upon the morrow.

But in the night, while all men slept, the holy bishop was wafted away from the scene of his tribulations. The soldiers found next day his portion of bread and cruse of water untouched beside his couch ; but his mortal frame had vanished, nor could any man say where it might be found, though diligent search was made.

Here again the voice of calumny, which had so often assailed the Saint while living, did not spare him in death. It was reported that by gifts and promises he had prevailed upon his guards to liberate him ; but it was later recognised that the prosperous position which two of these men afterwards attained was due to the influence of the Saint's example, working like good seed in fruitful soil.

With very different motives did his followers seek to track the traces of Eutychus.



## THE LEGEND OF ST. EUTYCHUS

When the days of persecution were past, a little child discovered in a half-way house upon the road to Rome an apron and buskins which were recognised as belonging to the Saint, and these precious relics were long venerated by the faithful of Laodicea as a memorial of their departed bishop. Nor did his flock cease to follow gently the path along which he was wont to lead them, amid green fields and pleasant pastures.



ST. USAGE AND  
ST. EXPEDITE



## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

**I**N a far-off upland district of the Aube, remote from the track of travellers, the village of St. Usage keeps alive the memory of a patron saint whose comparative obscurity in the calendar scarcely corresponds to the place which might have been given him if that august roll of names had been compiled or revised by an authority less unworldly than the Congregation of Sacred Rites, or whatever venerable body is entrusted with that solemn office. How is it, one asks, that Usage, whose influence has been so far-reaching among the lives of men, should be so little celebrated by the Church? Yet again and again in some most critical moment have not statesmen and leaders, in whose hands the welfare of the State has rested, knowing not whither to turn in their distress, breathed a prayer to this patron

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

saint? They have leaned upon Usage in the hour of their greatest need, sometimes even when they knew it not, often knowing that they had no other help.

Hardly less helpful has been the spirit of this great saint in moulding the thought and action of the leaders of the Church. The beautiful recurring refrain: "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end," may be held to owe its frequent occurrence in the liturgy in no small measure to his influence. Over all the confusion of our modern world, distraught by vain and passionate desires, it rings out like the voice of a great cathedral bell, calling still with the same deep and solemn tones, that sound forth across the noise of the traffic in the streets below, over the hum and babel of the little human voices which change and rise and fall in the breeze. Our visions fade, our plans and hopes fail and alter, but Usage still remains the same. The Bollandist fathers, whose unwearied labours have built up the great compilation of the "*Acta Sanctorum*," voyaged to and fro throughout Europe, tracking down and studying the sacred relics of the saints scattered in countless far-off shrines and remote churches and monasteries: in their long pilgrimage they must often have come

across traces of St. Usage, and one can imagine the joy with which they recognised some undoubted fragment of his relics, unexpectedly discovered amid unlikely surroundings. Yet an even longer pilgrimage would be needed to-day, were all the spots to be visited where his influence has made itself felt. How is it, one asks again, that in spite of this ever-growing sphere of his cult, the actual knowledge of the saint's life possessed not only by devout laymen, but by many priests themselves, is so vague and incomplete? The readiest explanation, perhaps, is to be found in the view that the saint's life resembles so closely in its details the customary story of the generality of saints that no striking features present themselves at once to the memory: to the casual observer it appears commonplace and the story fades into oblivion. His early piety, his lifelong abhorrence of heresy, schism, and all false doctrine, his frequent fastings, his labours throughout his diocese in dealing with lapses from the faith and new fangled teachings, his many miracles, and in particular the countless posthumous ones, present, after all, little to single them out from the story of many other saints. Yet one incident in his career cannot be thus passed by, if one has regard to its far-reaching consequences,

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

though at the time these were little realised. It need hardly be said that this event was the famous difference, for one must not call it a quarrel, between St. Usage and St. Expedite, which from that day to this has left a deep mark in history and may even be said to have separated the Church into two great schools of thought and action, according as men have inclined to the doctrine and example of one or other of these teachers.

St. Usage and St. Expedite had gone on pilgrimage together to the Holy Land ; a missionary voyage in which the goal was as much the salvation of erring souls as the devout visitation of sacred places. It was doubtless felt that the two saints possessed virtues admirably qualified to complete each other ; the one grave and cautious, the other full of fire and eagerness ; Usage giving his first thought to confirming and strengthening the faith of the flock, Expedite to the conversion of the infidels, in which holy task he was so successful that it is said that immediately after a great victory by the Christian armies, in which the pagan hosts were overthrown with mighty slaughter, he baptized more than four thousand new converts in one day.

But, alas, like the apostles Paul and Barnabas, the two saints, who appeared



destined each to fill what was lacking in the other's part, came to a point at which duty seemed to beckon along divergent paths. Expedite urged his plan with vehemence, Usage remained calm and unmoved, convinced that his choice was right ; neither would yield, and words passed, which, had they not fallen from the lips of saints, might have signified great anger and have produced bitter resentment ; but the holy men contented themselves with quoting selections from the Psalms which they felt to be especially appropriate to the occasion, and St. Usage also made use of the rich liturgy of the Communion Service, with which he was ever familiar.

Tradition tells that the separation between the two Saints took place on the way between Jerusalem and Jericho, at a point where a steep path diverged from the high road, descending abruptly to the valley of the Jordan. For long the difference between the holy men had been growing more obvious, for Usage was ever stopping to record some ancient tradition or to visit some sacred spot, while Expedite chafed at the delay, eager to cross the Jordan and commence the missionary journey in the Far East, the thought of which still impelled him onward. The younger saint naturally wished to take

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

the rougher and more direct road, and urged that they could by this way go to Jericho far more speedily, but his companion was obdurate: the broad high road was in every way more convenient, it was the one always taken by pilgrims, and unless they went that way they could not visit, he said, the Good Samaritan Inn, which was a noted resort of palmers, and one wherein they could stay at exceptionally small expense and with great profit to their souls. The dispute waxing very warm, there came up to the spot a company of devout laymen, who were also on their way to Jericho, and these speedily ranged themselves some on the side of Expedite, and others, weightier alike in age and numbers, on that of Usage. But these good men, in their ignorant zeal, went to unseemly lengths and presently were betrayed by the adversary into depths of anger which gave rise, not only to foolish words, but also to blows, which the Saints with much ado sought to restrain, until at length they prevailed upon the contending factions to separate, Expedite leading off a small band of eager pilgrims by the rough, straight path, Usage guiding the larger company by the great high road, in the assurance that they would meet at last at their journey's end. Yet Usage felt in his heart that their

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

separate ways might not bring them together speedily, and he made a covenant with Expedite that, if they did not meet at Jericho, they should find each other in a year and a day at the port of Joppa: he entreated Expedite, moreover, amid his zeal for souls, not to neglect to seek, where he could, any precious relics of the saints which he might come across on his journey. So they parted in all friendship, though the anger of their followers was, alas, but allayed for a moment and broke out afresh as they went their several ways. When Usage at length reached Jericho, he could find no trace of Expedite, and this did but confirm his fellow pilgrims in their view, so that they did not hesitate to call him a false guide, rash and foolhardy, while some even went further, saying that he was no true Saint at all, which opinion has continued to gain ground in the Church even till this day.

The year appointed passed by and Usage returned to Joppa from his long journey around the Holy Land. He had visited every sacred place, gathering relics as he went, a raven's feather from the cave by the brook Kedron, where the prophet Elijah was fed; water in flasks from the Jordan, from the Pool of Siloam, from Jacob's Well and many other sacred springs; locusts and

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

camels' hair from the wilderness where St. John Baptist preached ; a piece of potsherd, with which it was piously believed the Patriarch Job scraped himself ; stones from the Temple of Solomon, cast-off clothing left by holy anchorets of long ago, bones of martyrs, and many equally precious objects, so numerous that seven she-asses, heavily laden, scarce sufficed to carry them. Yet even greater was the store of legends and sayings which the Saint brought back with him ; for, like St. Papias, he ever held that oral tradition was preferable to written records, and that in this way might be gathered priceless information for the edification of the Church, which could be preserved and handed on from mouth to mouth, secure from the contamination of heresy and the cavils of unbelief.

All that day and the next St. Usage waited, but without seeing any sign of Expedite : no returning pilgrim brought news of him, and with heavy heart the Saint prepared to embark on his homeward voyage. His precious cargo was carefully packed in the little ship : the sun was setting, and the last passengers had gone on board. Usage still lingered on shore, entreating the captain to wait a little longer, but at length the moment came when he, too, must take

his place. He was stepping on to the boat, when the sound of his name fell on his ears, and a man came hastening towards the beach, and presently laid at his feet a wallet and a scrip. He came, he said, from the blessed Expedite, having posted with all speed from a far-off land to bring this message and gift.

Usage unfolded the letter and opened the wallet, which contained three phials, one full of earth, the other full of water, the third seemingly empty. The letter, with brotherly greetings, told how Expedite had passed through India to the country of the Grand Cham, whom he had been successful in converting to the faith, with large numbers of his court and people. He had passed on still further and rejoiced to tell of the multitudes who were flocking into the fold. While the work before him was so great, he could not think of returning, but he had not been unmindful of his brother's prayer, and though he had found little time for such a quest, he had obtained from Prester John a flask of water which had fallen direct from heaven, a phial filled with earth from which Adam was made, and one which contained air that had been breathed by Moses and the children of Israel while passing through the Wilderness. They would be of greater value to Usage and his flock than they could ever

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

be to him, and he begged that he would accept them in token of their friendship. The tears came to the eyes of Usage as he took the precious gifts, and drawing from his bosom a little packet, carefully wrapped in sackcloth, he gave it to the messenger, bidding him to take it with his blessing to Expedite as a keepsake from him. It was, he said, the jawbone of an ass, given to him by an aged hermit at Gaza, who had assured him that it was either the very jawbone with which Samson slew the Philistines, or one equally full of virtue: might it be a token of the success which would befall his missionary labours and of the victories he would win for the faith! So Usage returned to his people and distributed his treasures throughout the Churches and monasteries of his diocese, whence precious fragments were in due time scattered far and wide in many lands, along with teachings and traditions from the Saint's own mouth. When, in the course of years, he expired in the odour of sanctity, the surviving fellow pilgrims who had accompanied him on his travels, many of them now having taken orders and received high preferment in the Church, were not lacking in doing honour to the Saint. Sodalties were constituted under his patronage and made it their special care, not only to spread

their patron's teachings, but to combat and expose the errors which were spread abroad by certain companies of rash men who gave themselves out as followers of St. Expedite. As years passed, the disciples of St. Usage increased in numbers, and though from time to time foolish men arose who ventured to oppose them, the doctrines of St. Usage ever continued to gain ground and the opposing school to lose favour. It was pointed out by the disciples of St. Usage that whatever success attended the labours of Expedite had been of short duration ; his converts seemed to have faded away or lapsed into infidelity ; no certain record was preserved of his martyrdom or of the particulars of his death ; and they cast doubt upon the authenticity of his relics, which certain credulous persons had recently brought from the East. No one, on the other hand, had ever doubted the relics of St. Usage, or questioned the place which unanimous tradition gave him.

The controversy raged for many years, until at length the highest authority in the Church was invoked ; to the delight of the followers of St. Usage the declaration went forth that the veneration paid to Expedite was without authority, a fond thing, vainly invented, and his cult a superstition which it was the duty of all faithful pastors to suppress.

## ST. USAGE AND ST. EXPEDITE

Yet such is the weakness of human nature, that votive candles yet burn before the image of this uncanonised saint, and still one may see in many a church in France the mural tablets that record the gratitude of his votaries for the prompt help accorded them at his intercession in their hour of need. Human nature has been too strong even for the authority of Rome itself : there come moments when the ways of Usage seem intolerably slow, and from the depths of simple hearts the cry goes up : “ St. Expedite, priez pour nous ! ”







# THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA



## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

THE story of St. Opportuna which has been handed down to us by ancient historians does not appear to present any incidents of unusual interest, her name being simply preserved in brief ecclesiastical records as that of the saintly Abbess of Montreuil, who died in the later part of the eighth century, and whose relics were long venerated both in Paris and other parts of France, one jaw of the saint being preserved for centuries at the priory of St. Chrodegang at l'Isle-Adam. It is not recorded what became of the other jaw, but possibly it was dispersed in small fragments amongst the innumerable company of those who have honoured the saint's name in their lives, if not upon their lips.

The following account appears to rest upon the authority of a single manuscript,

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

itself of comparatively recent date, and is so completely at variance with the authorised legend that it may perhaps be considered as referring rather to another saint of the same name, who is otherwise unknown to history.

The blessed Opportuna was the child of parents of some standing in the world, and was brought up with no lack of the comfort which wealth could provide or ingenuity devise. In her early days she did not evince any vocation for the religious life, but gave herself, though with moderation, to those worldly pursuits which were customary amongst young women of her station in life ; but although she was much sought after in polite society and found delight in all manner of amusements, it is noteworthy that her conduct was so circumspect that no breath of scandal ever seemed to touch her, or at least none that was not presently refuted by her subsequent behaviour. Her disciples have often pointed to these early years as showing how men may be in the world but not of it, for in the midst of her relaxations she still found occasion to think of heavenly things, and it is believed that it was at this period that she composed that much admired treatise, " Manna, Loaves, and Fishes," wherein is set forth how man may find both

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

good things now and better things hereafter. Her affections became engaged at this time to a youth of honourable birth and comely mien, of whom men had great hopes: they were affianced, but before the marriage could be celebrated the betrothal was cancelled, and Opportuna soon afterwards wedded an aged nobleman, renowned for his piety and for his great wealth. Nor can it be doubted that in this she was obeying the guidance of some guardian angel, for the young man shortly thereafter plunged into wild dissipation and, making open mock of religion and society, in a fit of frenzy made away with his own life. Very often did the good Saint offer up her grateful prayers in that she had thus been delivered from union with a heretic and a suicide. Yet she was not to be untouched by the sorrows common to mankind, for after a brief space of time her noble husband was carried off by an apoplexy, leaving her all his worldly goods, but disconsolate in the loss of such a spouse, who, had he lived, would have shortly succeeded to a great title, which now passed to another kinsman.

Opportuna, wrestling with her inward sorrow, contrived to keep a placid and contented countenance before men, and devoted herself to good works, which her great wealth

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

made the more abounding. Her table was frequented by bishops and other holy clergy, especially of the higher ranks : few of these sought her help in vain, though with discerning eye she would turn from men whose orthodoxy was suspect, and from those ignorant and unlettered clerks who are wont to haunt the houses of the great in hope of some preferment.

This continued for many years, the holy widow's advice being sought by folk of all degrees, and seldom without good result, and it is not to be doubted that the multitude of her concerns did not hinder her inward spirit of devotion, though with fitting humility of spirit she skilfully concealed her austerities even from her intimates. The crisis of her life came unexpectedly. The kingdom of the Franks was at that time much harried by bands of pagan pirates from the north, who wrought much desolation wherever they fared. It so chanced that a very large company of these pirates had been gathered together under the leadership of one Simplicius, who, strange to say, had himself a little while before received baptism at the hands of a holy hermit. Simplicius laid siege with his bands to the city where Opportuna dwelt, and, provoked at its obstinate resistance, made a vow, if he took



## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

the place, to spare the life and goods of none, save only religious persons, for whom, being a new convert, he entertained great respect. It was at this time that a plan, which had doubtless long been ripening in the mind of Opportuna, led to her taking the step which she admitted her heart had often longed for. She took the veil and turned her palace into a religious house, being shortly afterwards installed as its Superior, an office to which her wisdom, sanctity, and experience pre-eminently fitted her. The Abbey, like that of St. Hilda at Whitby, was for both sexes, a practice which gave no rise to scandal in that devout age. To it speedily flocked a large number of the noblest and wealthiest citizens of the town, while others who were prevented by weighty private reasons from taking this step enrolled themselves in a confraternity or guild in close relation to the Abbey, so that in a short time news reached the enraged Simplicius that all the inhabitants of the city who were worth the plundering had become religious persons. That very night the barbarian host vanished from before the city, without doubt, as men averred, in answer to the potent prayers of the holy Abbess Opportuna. But Simplicius, horrible to relate, relapsing from the faith, became a pagan once again ; for shortly afterwards

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

chancing upon St. Chrodegang, Bishop of Seez, returning in great pomp from a pilgrimage to Rome and other holy places, he fell upon the good bishop without more ado and slew him, with all his train, saying that he had had enough of religious persons, adding thereby blasphemy to sacrilege.

Great was the honour which came to the holy Abbess when the news of the miraculous preservation of her city came to be known ; but when questioned as to her part therein, she was wont simply to shake her head, as though she would refuse the glory ; howbeit, in spite of all her modesty, word of the miracle continued to spread.

From this time onward the austerities of the Abbess increased and could not be hidden from observation, in spite of all that she did to make an appearance of allowing herself those mitigations which the Church has mercifully permitted to soften the rigours of abstinence. But in secret she went to greater lengths, and on her death a new hair shirt of great roughness was discovered in her room, which the Saint seems to have procured to replace one which must have been worn out with long use and therefore destroyed in private shortly before her decease.

When she felt her power failing and saw that her end was near, she gathered to

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

her bedside her disciples, who included all the most notable people of the province, and prayed them to bear in mind her precepts—above all, in the troublous times which she foresaw approaching, holding fast to that golden rule, which, albeit not enshrined in Holy Writ, was yet very dear to her, and, as she held, formed a part of the depositum fidei of the Church (although prophetically foreseen by a heathen poet), “in medio tutissimus ibis.” Thus very calmly did she depart this life, and her followers noted with awe that her figure bore no mark of the inward sorrows and outward disciplines which she had taken upon herself through so many years.

At the time of her death she was engaged upon a treatise which, had she lived to complete it, might have led to her being proclaimed, as was in later years St. Theresa, a doctor of the Church. It was an exposition of those hard texts of the Gospel in which there seems to be laid down an opposition between the Divine precepts and the accustomed rules and practice of polite society, between certain of the sayings of our Lord and those laws by which the world is known to be governed. Saint Opportuna did not attempt, as some rash critics have done, to tamper with the sacred text. With insight

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

and reverence she unfolded the inner meaning of words which, on the face of them, could not mean merely what they said. Alas ! that her great exposition of the Sermon on the Mount should not have survived to set at nought those foolhardy men who dare in our day to make use of it to turn the world upside down ! It is recorded that a bishop, who was her confessor, who had been troubled by scruples as to the great wealth of his see and the sight of the poverty and wretchedness of certain of his flock, wept tears of joy upon reading the first draft of this exposition of hers, and thereupon gave up all thought of laying down his bishopric. The treatise, we are told, brought great ease of mind to judges and magistrates, to men in high authority in the State, as well as to certain officers who at that time had been troubled by the spread of a dangerous but brief lived heresy which taught that the nature of war was out of harmony with the spirit of Christ. It is strange, indeed, that a book whose effect was so profound and so widespread should not have survived unto our day. But happily the teaching of the Saint has not been lost upon the Church, and the influence of her thought lives on, still reconciling the ways of men to God. For many years her disciples banded themselves together in a guild or

## THE LEGEND OF ST. OPPORTUNA

confraternity, which kept alive her sayings. In the course of centuries, however, this guild became dispersed, though there can be little doubt that in secret thousands still pay their veneration to the Saint, although they hesitate to-day to take upon themselves in their unworthiness the name of Opportunists. The Litany of St. Opportuna, it is true, survives, and is much used at election times, in public meetings, in booths and places where men vote. St. Opportuna, moreover, is the patron of those who come into compacts and coalitions. In former times it was the custom of statesmen, when addressing their followers, to swear by the jaw of St. Opportuna, but this solemn oath has fallen into desuetude.



ST. HILARY AND  
ST. SEVERUS





## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

**N**O two saints could have been more unlike than were St. Severus the Great and St. Hilary the Little. Their bodily forms were as different as their minds. St. Severus was very tall and thin, dark-haired, and of sallow and meagre countenance ; St. Hilary more than commonly short and stout, fair and ruddy of feature, with eyes that seemed to smile, even though there were no laughter upon his lips. St. Severus was ever sober and grave of face ; he cast his eyes continually downward, lest perchance they should light upon a woman or on some other vanity of this life : he had a great gift of tears, and so solemnising was his presence that, as he passed by, the children, it was said, would stay their idle play, and the sparrows from their chattering overhead.

## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

The very outset of their lives marked the Saints' diversity. When Hilary was baptised, though but ten days old, his face was lit up by a heavenly smile and he crowed with joy as the priest took him in his arms and kissed him. When Severus was held at the font, he wailed and wept bitterly, as though expressing with his infant voice that horror of sin which in later life was the Saint's most signal characteristic.

At an early age St. Severus renounced the vanities of the world and took refuge in the sacred solitudes of Nitria, where even the holiest monks were amazed at the strictness of his fasts and vigils. Here he wrote, in the intervals of frequent scourgings and other disciplines, some of his most famous works : " The Seventy Sorrows of the Soul " ; " The Seven Vials of Wrath " ; his " Exposition of the Great Woes of the Apocalypse," and other spiritual treatises. He was in due time called to fill the office of Abbot of the chief monastery of Nitria, which had much declined since the days of the great Pambo, and needed the restoring hand of a stern ruler. Severus established once again a strict and rigorous order : but one meal a day was allowed to the novices, and the cells resounded once again with the sound of pious scourgings and the solemn chant of penitential Psalms ;

for Severus was resolved that the holy place should become once more worthy of its name of the Paradise of the Fathers, as it had been in the good days of old.

Hilary had no marvellous inward call to the monastic life. His vocation came unsought, when his parents took him in a season of great drought to one of the outlying desert monasteries nearest to their home. The threat of famine was over the land, and they hoped by the dedication of their son to the monastic life to obtain blessing both for themselves and him, lessening the hungry mouths in their little home, and securing for their child both food and salvation. Brought up by the monks with whom he was placed, he ate cheerfully the simple food provided for him, working daily in the monastery garden, and winning the confidence not only of his brethren but of all the wild creatures about him. Birds and mice would come at his call, and even the little lizards left their hiding places to come near and listen as he sang his joyful hymns while he went about his work. He laughed for joy when he woke at dawn ; he sang at his daily task ; he fell asleep each night with cheerful heart, and as he slept, he smiled.

The fame of the sanctity of Severus spread through Egypt, and the good patriarch

## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

of Alexandria chose him as an instrument well fitted to carry the work of reform into other monasteries where laxity had crept in. Thus he came to be appointed to visit the monastery of Hilary, and must have been no little troubled at what he found there. To bring the monks to graver mood, he lessened and strictly regulated their simple meals and bade them put bitter herbs in the water which they drank. Yet still, when he came again, Severus found a spirit very different from what he desired to see; and as he sought diligently, it became clear to him that the monk Hilary was the centre of the influence against which he was striving. For his own soul's good and for the welfare of his brethren, Severus bade Hilary go forth in pilgrimage towards the rising of the sun and not return, unless he brought back with him a notable relic, the sight of which should reprove all scandalmongers, and likewise bitter herbs more potent than those of Egypt, which should day by day be consumed by the reformed brotherhood. Hilary bowed himself and went forth smiling. Across the desert of Sinai he wandered, joining himself to a caravan of pilgrims, whose steps were made lighter by his cheery presence, so that instead of penitential Psalms, they all fell to singing the song of the Three Holy Children,

and when they rested at evening, Hilary gathered them round him and sang to them his own hymn of praise. They came to the great monastery of Sinai, where the monks received Hilary kindly, but when he told them of his mission, the good abbot shook his head. Notable relics were not easy to come by now, and the bitter herbs of Sinai were not more potent than those of Egypt. Hilary must go further ; but if he returned with the herbs he sought, the abbot promised him he would find him in the meanwhile some worthy relic with which to enrich the treasure of his own convent in Egypt. And so it came about that Hilary passed across Arabia and the realm of Persia, and still eastward and northward through peoples of strange tongues and pagan faiths. But ever his smile made him welcome, though often he had no other language with which to speak. So it came about at last that he came to a country beneath a great range of high mountains, whose summits reached far into the sky. Upwards he climbed and onward, and as evening fell, he found himself alone on a rough pathway with no friendly house in sight ; when suddenly there came upon his joyful ears a sound like that of a convent bell, and as he turned the corner of a ridge, he saw before him a great building.

## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

A monastery surely it was, and dark-robed monks, clad in strange garb, welcomed him at the door. They took him in and brought him food and drink, and Hilary's heart was glad, for he felt that here, at the world's end, he would find at last what he sought. He took from his wallet a handful of dried herbs and poured them into his cup, for it was still his wont to use the bitter herbs of Egypt till he found the more potent herbs which he was sent to procure. The strange monks looked with wonder at him, and one of them shook his head and went within; and presently, as Hilary sat at meat, the monk returned, bearing in his hand another cup, in which he had set a few dried leaves of dark colour, and presently poured upon them from a metal flagon water steaming hot. This cup he now set before Hilary, taking away the first cup with a frown. And lo! there arose around him a fragrance wonderful. Hilary bowed his head and drank, and as he drank he felt as though he was once again at evening in his garden, with the sweet breath of the flowers all around. Round about him stood the monks and smiled, and Hilary was filled with great joy, for he knew that this must be the bitter herb he was seeking, which by a wondrous miracle became a drink so fragrant. So very

gladly did he sing his evening hymn that night in the strange land.

It is told that Hilary stayed in that monastery for three days and, though he could not speak their tongue, the monks treated him like a brother, and their abbot gave him as a parting gift a wooden case, filled with leaves of the wondrous herb, to take back to his own country.

Thus, after many days, he came again to Arabia, and returned to the monastery of Sinai to seek the relic which had been promised to him. The abbot questioned him on his journey, and Hilary gave him to taste of the leaves of his marvellous herb, pouring upon them water from a seething cauldron, to the great wonder of all the monks. But still greater was their wonder as they watched the face of their abbot as he drank and saw his countenance change and become suddenly transfigured. "My son," said the abbot, "this is a goodly herb and thy pilgrimage has been blessed indeed. I have had search made amongst the places where great relics may still be obtained, and thou shalt take back with thee one, the sight of which may rebuke all gainsayers. If any henceforth seek to trouble thee, bid them look upon this relic, and tell them that it is the tail of the prophet Balaam's ass." So Hilary went homeward

## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

with his treasure to Egypt and came once more to his brethren. Great was their happiness when they saw him again and heard from him the story of his long journeyings; but when he brewed for them the drink of the wondrous herb and they tasted that strange fragrance, they could not contain their joy, but with one accord all joined in singing the canticles of praise which Hilary had sung with them in the days of old, before Severus changed the rule of their life. They were still singing, when the porter opened the convent door and Severus himself came in, for it was now his wont to come unawares to the communities under his oversight that he might the better note how faithfully they kept their rule. As they beheld him enter, the countenances of the monks fell, save only Hilary's, whose eyes shone as he stepped toward Severus, knelt before him, and kissed his hand. "I thank thee, reverend father, for the task thou didst give me, which has even now been accomplished: behold the relic given me in Sinai by the abbot of the great monastery, even the tail of the ass of Balaam the prophet. Behold the bitter herb which I have brought from afar, given me by the abbot who dwells beneath the great mountains which rise to the roof of the world." Severus was silent. He gazed with



reverence upon the ass's tail ; he took in his hand the cup. Slowly he quaffed the drink. The frown upon his face relaxed. He looked calmly upon Hilary. " I will take this penance a second time," he said, " alone, in my cell."

That night the brethren were filled with anxious thoughts, for they feared that Severus might lay new burdens upon them ; only Hilary slept peacefully, having no care in his heart. But when the morning came, Severus seemed milder than his wont. He called the brethren round him and told them that in the vigils of the night he had sought how best they should be guided, and it had grown clear to him that a rule which was good for many might not be good for all. He had striven to reform Brother Hilary in vain. No human power could quench his cheerfulness. It might be that some higher purpose had overruled them ; he could not but reverence the ass's tail, nor could he doubt the virtue of the bitter herb which Hilary had brought from far. Henceforth they should have leave to sing the hymns of Hilary and to live by his rule. But for his own part he was persuaded that, though it might be ordained by the mysterious decrees of Providence that Hilary and his company should go cheerfully through this vale of

## ST. HILARY AND ST. SEVERUS

sorrow, they were to be accounted men more to be admired than imitated, for it is meeter for the multitude to mourn and weep. Howbeit, one penance they must not fail to perform. Twice a year must two brethren fare eastward on pilgrimage to that monastery whence Hilary had brought his bitter herbs, and bring with them dried leaves of those same herbs to replenish their store, and once each day should they drink of the same. Moreover he himself, for a sign of fellowship, would share this penance with them, and in token thereof would take with him a parcel of the leaves to his own monastery.

So Hilary and his brethren lived in peace ; and in peace they died. If any man doubt his story, let him go to the City of Lucca and behold, among the precious relics there preserved, the tail of Balaam's ass. But let him not rashly ask how it came thither, for there be many mysteries in this world that the mind of man cannot fathom.





THE LEGEND OF  
ST. PLACID



## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

MANY and various are the offices of the saints who are invoked as patrons and protectors of the crafts and callings of men. There are famous saints whose protection is claimed by the great and powerful professions, as St. Nicholas, the patron of thieves and lawyers, and obscure saints whose help is sought by humble and simple men, like St. Juvénat, the swineherd hermit, to whose well come the peasants of the Argonne when their pigs are sick, and whose aid is found equally effectual when they touch his shrine with a morsel of bread and thereafter give it to their hogs as a blessed bolus, eagerly accepted by the suffering beasts. Midway between such saints as these we may place St. Placid, the patron of quiet and tranquil lives, the friend of those who love peace for

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

its own sake, and seek rest from the storms and passions of the world in retirement of soul, if not of body, from the ills which cumber mortal men.

St. Placid, the historians tell us, was the son of a noble and wealthy senator of Rome, who was brought by his father at a tender age to be a pupil of St. Benedict at Subiaco, and in due time embraced the monastic estate, which in that evil and turbulent age provided, as no other way of life, a haven of calm, most welcome to one who shrank from the pollutions and perils of the civil state and its transitory joys. But one well-known incident is preserved from this period of St. Placid's life, that of his miraculous preservation from drowning, when he had gone as a novice to fill a pitcher in the lake and slipped into its deep waters. St. Benedict, perceiving from afar the young novice's danger, bade St. Gall, who was an older fellow pupil, go to his succour. St. Gall hastened to the lake, where he found Placid calmly floating, and speeding across the water, he secured hold of the lad with the good Abbot's crook and steered him to land, unruffled by danger or by the waves of the lake. The novice grew in grace and took his monk's vows. So adapted to the peaceful monastic life were the young man's ways,



## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

that St. Benedict chose him, when still but a few years passed twenty in age, to be the first Abbot of the new monastery which had been founded by the patriarch at Messina in Sicily. Here he ruled for a short time with exemplary devotion, until an unexpected terror smote the countryside; for, even as some eagle might drop from the clear sky upon a litter of helpless rabbits, a murderous band of Saracens fell suddenly upon the peaceful monastery. According to all records hitherto known to us, the result was the destruction of the sacred edifice and the massacre of St. Placid, together with all his monks. A careful examination of the ancient authorities, however, seems to show traces that at one time another St. Placid was venerated as a Saint along with the Martyr of Messina, and this circumstance, perhaps, affords a clue to the version of the Saint's life which is here offered to the reader from a source which, if not ancient, is as worthy of credence as many of undoubted antiquity which have hitherto found acceptance with the faithful. At the time of the unexpected calamity which resulted in the destruction of the newly founded monastery, the Abbot had retired for a season of quiet devotion to an oratory situated at some little distance above it on the mountain side.

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

He was so rapt in meditation as to be quite unaware of the marauders' raid, until the cries of the martyred monks and the curses and yells of the assassins penetrated his ears, and turning his eyes downwards, he beheld his beloved monastery already in flames and the crowd of infidel soldiers hastening to and fro with their booty.

Perceiving all too clearly what was taking place, the first thought of the Saint was to rejoin his flock and, if his intercessions could not avail to save them, at least to perish with them in one common martyrdom. Yet even as the longing for this filled his heart, he bethought him that this very desire might be but a snare of the enemy of souls. He had no right to seize with rash hand the martyr's crown, which was to be the privilege of his monks, for it must come unsought, just as it was his duty not to shrink from it, if come it should. Clearly it was not for nothing that on this day he had been called apart to this place of retirement. It might well be that some purpose, unknown to him, had guided him to that spot, and that his work was needed in this vale of tears. So, struggling with his natural emotion, he turned once more to his oratory, and as the distant cries and hubbub grew fainter, the Saint's prayers went up for his brethren and for

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

their enemies, and in his longing for their salvation he quite forgot his own need and trouble.

The night came, but he scarcely marked the red glow below him from the burning buildings. It passed, and the day disclosed to his gaze, when at length he turned his eyes downwards, nothing but a pile of smouldering ruins, where but a little while before the monastery had stood on which he had set such high hopes. As he looked, he seemed to see before him a microcosm of the world he had left long ago, and murmured to himself with prophetic insight the lines which centuries afterwards were to be penned by Thomas of Celano :

*Dies irae, dies illa*

*Solvat mundum in favilla.*

Was not his own position, too, a parable? Did not the calm and isolation in which he had been so marvellously preserved at such an hour figure forth the true attitude of the Church and her leaders to the evils and misfortunes of the world?

Cruelty and oppression, theft and violence, murders and massacres, these were of the earth, like the mists of this passing life; those whose conversation is in heaven have no part in such things and should not let them make their thoughts captive. The

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

path of the Church lies on a higher level ; her prayers and sympathy may rightly be given to the sufferer and sinner, but her lot must never be confounded with theirs by active interference in the affairs of this world ; for this would be nothing less than to desert the higher pathway for the lower, to leave the sunlight of the mountain for the mist and dust of the plain.

Thus did St. Placid foresee the position which in later centuries has been taken by so numerous a company of Christian leaders, who have learned in his school to look with calm on the evils around them, concentrating their thought on a better world, except in so far as lawful and necessary measures for their own needs are concerned.

In order to avoid disturbance of his seasons of meditation or burdening his brethren by frequent errands, it had been St. Placid's custom to have an abundant store of such provisions as were customary to be used in the monastery to be placed in a cell adjoining his mountain oratory, and thus at this season of trial he was able, like Elijah of old, to find the sustenance which he needed in his solitary retreat. Providence, he felt, had sent him this food, carried to his cell in earlier days by black-robed monks in place of ravens. Hard by was a garden

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

of herbs and fruit trees, whose owner had doubtless been slain or carried captive by the Saracen marauders ; herein, too, the Saint saw clearly the finger of Providence at work. It was no hard task for him, dwelling as an anchorite beside his oratory, to keep this garden in good order, setting aside a sufficiency of beans and roots for the winter season, so that there might be no care for the morrow, but rather that he might tranquilly fulfil the apostolic precept and provide things needful in the sight of all men.

Such of the inhabitants of the district as had not been slain or taken captive by the Saracen raiders had escaped to a distance and did not venture back at once, so that St. Placid had leisure to meditate upon his future duties. If, as was almost certain to happen, the monastery were rebuilt, he would naturally be expected, as the Abbot and sole surviving member of the old community, to resume his former duties and station. But when the joy at finding him safe had subsided, might not malicious tongues bring calumnies against him which would hinder the cause of truth and the progress of the Church ? How was it that the Abbot had not shared the lot of his martyred flock, they would ask, nor would they hesitate to

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

suggest base and unworthy reasons for his escape. Such aspersions St. Placid could cheerfully submit to, as far as his own person was concerned ; indeed he accounted them rather as matter for rejoicing and an opportunity for self abasement : but he shrank from the thought of the scandal to the Order and the injury to the Church which might spring from these evil imputations and back-bitings. At whatever cost to himself, the Church must have peace. He had already died to the world once ; he would now die again. This oratory, his simple cell, and the garden that adjoined it, would supply the needs of body and soul alike. They afforded an uninterrupted view over Messina and the ruined convent. Here he could still look out upon his former home, watch its rebuilding, and pray for the new brotherhood. From time to time pilgrims from the city would come with offerings to his hermitage to seek absolution from the lonely anchorite and give him news of the doings of the evil world beyond. When he was not engaged in his devotions, he might sit beneath his fruit trees or amongst his flowers and look out over sea and mountain and the far-off city. This simplest of lives should suffice him.

And so it came about. Little by little folk returned to the countryside and learned

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

of the presence of the holy anchorite in his mountain cell. His beard had grown, and this alone would have sufficed to hide him from those who had known the young Abbot in earlier days ; if any asked his name, he answered that he was but one dead to the world and had no need of any other name than Brother. But he was soon known near and far as the hermit father of the mountain, and many were the pious feet that climbed up to see him and bring the little comforts, without which his frugal fare, as all said, would have been scant indeed.

So the years passed and old age came gently on. In spite of the fame that had come unsought to him, Placid was happy in this life of his, and the far-off past seemed more distant than the convent bell, whose pealing came up daily to him through the still air.

The tranquillity in which he passed his days had for long been associated with an unexpected consequence of the earliest months of his hermit life, when he had been completely cut off from the outer world of men. He was desirous of finding some incense for his oratory, but the whole store which the monastery possessed had been burnt with the buildings. In its place, therefore, he searched in his garden for fragrant herbs which, when dried, might be burnt and give

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

forth sweet odours, and at length, after many trials, he found one, which he had not seen elsewhere, and which was perchance brought into this corner of Sicily by some foreign mariner, the fragrance of which was peculiarly grateful to him. He had no censer, but fashioned himself a small bowl of the wood of a wild cherry, and by means of a long stem of hollow wood inserted into the bowl, he was able to keep the dry leaves gently smouldering. One day, in a period of deep meditation, without realising what he was doing, St. Placid, instead of blowing into the bowl, as was his wont, drew out the blue white incense smoke through the tube into his mouth. He only perceived what was taking place as his eye caught on a little ring or crown of fair white vapour, which must have passed from his lips and now mounted slowly into the sky, growing wider as it ascended.

He was filled with joy at the sight, and there came into his thankful heart the thought that this silvery ring or crown might be the presage of future blessedness. Taking the bowl into his hands, he drew the incense again and again into his mouth and endeavoured to see if once more such a fair white wreath might issue from his lips, but in vain. It was evident that such a rare sign was not one to come at will. But from that day



## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

St. Placid began to find a peculiar delight in his humble incense bowl, and often when his simple meal was ended, he would take it from the niche in which it lay to a seat of stone in his garden overlooking the sea, where with thankful heart he sat and watched the blue white vapour ascend into the sky. More than once, at long intervals, he had the joy of seeing once again the smoke formed into a distinct wreath or halo, though this was never so clear and bright and wide, he thought, as that first crown of white which he had beheld on that memorable day.

St. Placid was now far advanced in years, and again and again the pilgrims who came to him would beg him to have care of his infirmities and allow some disciple to live with him. For long the Saint would not yield; but at last he, too, perceived that the time would soon come when he could no longer live without help, and confided his decision to an aged priest, who sometimes came to join him in his devotions. The good priest, however, did not fall in with the advice which others had given, but sought to persuade his friend rather to leave his mountain retreat and end his days in the quiet of some monastery, where he might be edified by converse with more mature brethren and have all things necessary for the welfare of body

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

and soul close at hand. What could be fitter than that he should enter the monastery of Messina, whose bell had so often cheered his solitude, and for whose welfare he ever prayed with such diligence? He would himself go and propose the thing to the Abbot, who, he doubted not, would be overjoyed to receive such an honoured inmate into his walls. Almost before St. Placid had grasped it, his friend had gone, and on the very next day, while he was still meditating over the proposal, there came to his cell the Subprior of the monastery, bearing to the holy hermit a cordial message of welcome from the Abbot.

St. Placid received the messenger with his accustomed calm. He had given much thought to his friend's proposal; there was no monastery, he said, which he would enter with such deep feeling as that of Messina. There was one request alone that he would ask, if he came; that he might be permitted to burn incense in his own way, in the humble bowl of wood which had served him here in his mountain solitude, which he would fain take with him even to his convent cell. He asked no other favour; he would gladly enter the monastery under whatever name the Abbot might please to give him, at once the oldest and the youngest brother in the community.

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The Sub-prior assured him that the Abbot would be delighted to grant this simple request, and the same was solemnly confirmed by the Abbot himself, when a week later he stood at the Abbey gate to welcome the holy hermit, whose steps had been guided there by the Sub-prior. A lay brother followed, bearing his little incense bowl, together with a store of dried herbs, which St. Placid would by no means leave behind, although the Sub-prior assured him that the monastery possessed a rich stock of incense of far nobler quality, brought from the Holy Land itself.

“Holy Father,” said the Abbot, “most gladly do I welcome thee to this our monastery. Thou shalt still burn thy mountain incense amongst us in thine own way, if so it please thee ; and since thou has humbly left to me the choice of the name which thou shalt bear in religion, I give thee that of one whom we reverence with peculiar honour in this spot, the Abbot who, more than fifty years ago, was martyred here with all his monks by the Saracen invaders. His relics, alas ! we cannot say that we with certainty possess, for the bodies of the martyrs were buried beneath the burning ruins and men sought for his mortal remains in vain ; but we have often felt that he has been near us

## THE LEGEND OF ST. PLACID

in spirit. I can give thee no more honoured Saint for thy patron, none worthier thy past holy life. Henceforth live welcome amongst us under the name of Brother Placid."

### NOTE.

It may be objected by sceptical critics that the Saracen occupation of Sicily continued for several centuries after the taking of Messina, and that it is, therefore, unlikely that the monastery of St. Placid could have been rebuilt so soon after its destruction. To this objection it suffices to answer that the authority of an ecclesiastical history must in its nature be superior to that of profane historians.



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